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## The Iwakura Mission's Experiences of German Music Culture in 1873 and the Revitalization of the ›Noh‹ Theater as Their Consequence

### I. Introduction

From March to May 1873, the Iwakura Mission from Japan visited the German Empire for the first time in its itinerary. The Mission stayed, for instance, in Essen, Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt a.M., and Munich (in the chronological order). Of these cities, Berlin was given the longest sojourn, 19 days from March 9 to 28, the fourth longest after Washington, London and Paris. During these days, the Mission visited several places in and out of the city of Berlin, paid several official visits to the Emperor William I, and saw an opera.

On March 11, for the evening, the principal members of the Mission were invited to the Imperial Theater in Berlin, and Kunitake Kume (1839–1931), private secretary to the head of the Mission, Tomomi Iwakura (1825–1883), mentioned the event in an official publication he compiled later. The record of the occasion is found in Tokumei Zenken Taishi: Beio Kairan Jikki (A True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary's Journey Through the United States of America and Europe), compiled by Kume, as follows: »In the evening, we went to the Emperor's Theater; this was called ›ohera‹ [opera], and the finest of various kinds of theatrical performances. This ›ohera‹ was similar to our ›Sarugaku‹ [Nob Theater].«<sup>1</sup>

This account is of prime importance for us to understand the revitalization and promotion of the *Nob* Theater as national art by Iwakura and Kume several years after their return in Japan. The *Nob* Theater, a major form of Japanese theatre established in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, was on the decline at the beginning of the Meiji period after the Tokugawa regime – that had promoted it as an official art – collapsed and the Edo period ended.

Although the Mission's interests were directed more toward utilitarian matters, industry and technology, for instance, yet their experiences in Western art, music and theater were relatively well documented. So naïve in knowledge and experience of Western culture, the members of the Mission, with certain instinct, appreciated its essence and realized the importance of traditional national art.

1 Kunitake Kume, *Tokumei Zenken Taishi: Beio Kairan Jikki* (1878), Tokyo 1975. My translation from vol. 3, chap. 57, p. 351. For another English translation, see Kunitake Kume, *The Iwakura Embassy 1871 to 1873: A True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary's Journey Through the United States of America and Europe*, vol. 3: *Continental Europe 1*, transl. by Andrew Cobbing, Chiba and Princeton 2002, p. 307.

In this essay, based on the contemporary documents, I intend to analyze their experiences in Western music, and to discuss their ideas about traditional art as national identity. Through this discussion, I wish to contribute to the general theme of the Congress, »Musik und kulturelle Identität«, or at least to offer a topic for further discussion.

## II. The Iwakura Mission

The Iwakura Mission was an unprecedented scale of enterprise undertaken by the newly formed government of the modern Japan in early Meiji period. A few years after the Tokugawa regime surrendered its power to the Meiji Emperor in 1868,<sup>2</sup> about 50 leading Japanese statesmen and officials, headed by the senior Minister Iwakura, toured the United States and European countries, for as many as 632 days, from December 1871 to September 1873. It was ambitious in scope, and there has been none of such since then.

The Mission visited twelve countries in all: the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany – Prussia, Bavaria and other provincial countries at that time –, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Austria and Switzerland, in order of their itinerary. In general, they travelled eastward.

Its primary tasks were: first, to pay good-will visits to those Western countries with which the modern Japanese government had concluded treaties of friendship and commerce and to revise their inequalities; second, to exchange ideas with Japanese foreign offices about the operation of the treaties; and third, to get first-hand information about Western culture and society, especially after almost 300 years of seclusion of Japan from the outer world. Of these tasks, the first, the most important, and the second, were not as remarkably successful as they had originally planned, concerning the revision of the inequality in particular, but the third task turned out to be the most significant for the development of the modern Japanese society thereafter.

## III. The Berlin Experience

The Mission's arrival and reception were documented in several newspapers in Berlin at that time: *Spenerische Zeitung*, *Neue Preußische Zeitung*, *Vossische Zeitung*, for instance.<sup>3</sup> The Mission stayed in Hotel de Rome, at Unter den Linden, and was warmly welcomed by the government officials and the Imperial household. Kume wrote: »The level of care taken over our protection surpassed that in the other countries we visited.«<sup>4</sup>

And from these journalistic documents, we can confirm that the opera they saw in the evening of March 11 was Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, there is no further

2 The last shogun Yoshinobu Tokugawa (1837–1913) lost political power by the surrender, which resulted in the restoration of the Emperor system.

3 See Ulrich Wattenberg, »Die Iwakura-Mission in Berlin«, in: *Berlin–Tokyo im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Wolfgang Brenn and Marie-Luise Goerke, Berlin e.a. 1997, p. 63–64.

4 See Kume, *Tokumei Zenken*, vol. 3, chap. 57, p. 336; and *ibid.*, *A True Account*, vol. 3, p. 295. For a German translation see Ulrich Wattenberg, »Die Iwakura-Mission in Preußen«, in: *Japan und Preußen*, ed. by Gerhard Krebs, München 2002, p. 110.

information about the event in the newspapers or in Kume's *Account*. If he or any of the delegates had commented on the opera itself or anything related to the event, it would be extremely interesting to us. In the *Account*, however, the title of the opera was not even mentioned.

But, as already mentioned, it is important to know from Kume's comments that the opera is regarded as the finest of theatrical performances, and that the opera is pointed out as being similar to the Japanese *Nob* Theater. Of course, it is easy to see their superficial similarities; both theatres are staged, costumed, acted, narrated or sung, with instrumental accompaniment. But the comments should have more significance than this observation if we follow the subsequent development of such recognition of the *Nob* Theater, the development that is to revitalize and promote it as national art by Iwakura and Kume after their return in Japan. Thus, the Mission's visit to Berlin is to be remembered because the recognition of the similarity between the opera and the *Nob* Theater was made for the first time in Kume's *Account* there.

#### IV. Other Musical Experiences in Europe

In addition to these experiences in the theatre, the Mission also encountered with other types of Western music on quite a few occasions. As an example of church music, though not from Germany, the following record is found: »On October 20, 1872, from 11 am., Iwakura and other members attended a service at St. Johns Episcopal Church in Princess Street, Edinburgh.«<sup>6</sup> Although the record does not tell, it is most likely that the members heard music for the service.

Also, if not strictly church music, when they stayed in Liverpool from September 29 through October 3, 1872, they visited the Saint George Chapel and heard organ music in the morning of October 3. *A True Account* reads as follows:

10:50 am., we went to the Saint George Chapel in front of the hotel. From the hotel to the chapel, policemen guarded our way, and together with some 100 men and women of the city, we stepped in the church. With the doors closed, music was started. This church was built of stone, and the ceiling was quite high. [...] In front, there was a large musical instrument installed, [...] for this day, the instrument [organ] was worked, and two pieces of music were played. They were played by hands of one musician, and resounded through the building.<sup>7</sup>

5 For example, see *Vossische Zeitung* 11 March 1873; also see Ulrich Wattenberg, »Germany: An Encounter between Two Emerging Countries«, in: *The Iwakura Mission in America and Europe: A New Assessment*, ed. by Ian Nish, Richmond 1998, p. 115, and p. 213, n. 6; and Shin'ichiro Okabe, »Modernization and Its Implications in the Musical Context of Far East Asian Countries«, in: *Musicology and Globalization: Proceedings of the International Congress in Shizuoka 2002 in Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Musicological Society of Japan*, Tokyo 2004, p. 61.

6 Kume, *Tokumei Zenken*, vol. 2, chap. 32, p. 274; and *ibid.*, *A True Account*, vol. 2: *Britain*, transl. by Graham Healey, p. 266–267.

7 Kume, *Tokumei Zenken*, vol. 2, chap. 27, p. 148–49; and *ibid.*, *A True Account*, vol. 2, p. 145 and p. 153, n. 15.

According to the newspaper *Daily Courier*, dated October 4, 1872, the two pieces performed were a march by Franz Liszt and the wedding march by Felix Mendelssohn, and the organist was William Thomas Best (1826–1897), one of the greatest English organ virtuosos of the day. Although there is no account for the music itself, one can be sure that the members experienced an essence of the 19th-century organ music, loud sound perhaps.

For an example of traditional music, which is rarely found in their documents, Scotland provided an occasion. In the mid-October 1872, Iwakura and other few members of the Mission made an excursion to the Highlands. On this occasion, when they visited the Tros-saches Hotel, they heard bagpipe music and were enchanted with the sound. *A True Account* on October 19 reads as follows:

And on the first coach, a Scottish instrument, called ›paafu-haafu‹ [bagpipe], was blown and guided us. ›Paafu-haafu‹ was played lengthwise like trumpet with pipes on either end. It sounded clear, clean and elegant. The sound led us through the woods, and enchanted us as if in the paradise.<sup>8</sup>

They seem to have liked the music very much, and it is also interesting to note that Kume's description here is particularly elegant, based on the rhymed style of traditional Chinese poetry.

## V. The Study of the *Noh* Tradition

After the Mission returned in Japan, September 1873, a political change occurred, and Iwakura and other top members of the Mission were occupied with the outcome for several years. However, Iwakura and Kume seem to have kept and shared the idea of the effectiveness of music as well as the importance of fostering an indigenous art. In his studies on music of the *Noh* theater, Kume recollected:

When I encountered Opera houses in the European palaces, I strongly felt the necessity of national art for entertainment. A decent art to create diverse spiritual comforts should not be one of those temporary fashionable arts, which live short, nor one of those momentarily imported from the outside; it should be the one of those traditional Japanese performing arts which have firm roots in the Japanese nationality. If we failed in selecting such national arts, the Japanese people would suffer from the lack of such art for entertainment. Then, I came to realize the artistic value of the *Noh* Theater.<sup>9</sup>

Before his encounters with Western art music, Kume was not necessarily an expert in the *Noh* art; rather he somewhat detested it because the *Noh* had been supported by the feudal lords of *Samurai* class, that is, the Tokugawa shogunate system, and because it had become

8 See *ibid.*, vol. 2, chap. 32, p. 267; and *ibid.*, *A True Account*, vol. 2, p. 257.

9 Kume Kunitake, *Kume Kunitake Rekishi Chosaku-shu* (Kume Kunitake's Writings on History), vol. 5: *Nihon Bunka-shi no Kenkyu* (Studies on the Cultural History of Japan), part 10: *Noh-gaku no Kako to Shourai* (The Past and Future of the *Noh* Theater), ed. by Toshiaki Ohkubo, Tokyo 1991, p. 78.

formalistic and ritualized.<sup>10</sup> But after his Western experiences, Kume started to study the *Nob* Theater and frequented *Nob* artists and performances. Originally, Kume was trained as a historiographer and in 1888 he became Professor of paleography at University of Tokyo, and later at Waseda University in Tokyo.<sup>11</sup> This experience in fact helped him jump into the study of the *Nob* Theater, a study that the professional *Nob* players may have been unable to start because of a certain hesitation they had in a scientific investigation of their hereditary tradition.

Although his argument was not always in agreement with the Japanese nationalistic movement of the time, especially with Shintoism, yet his scholarship proved itself to be important as being an objective approach by scrutinizing the old documents. He published a series of articles on the *Nob* Theater from the historical, structural and textual points of view.<sup>12</sup> This clearly marked the beginning of a scholarly investigation into the *Nob* Theater in modern Japan.

## VI. The Revitalization of the Noh Theater

On April 4, 1876, the Meiji Emperor was invited to Iwakura's private residence, and several *Nob* pieces were performed for him. Although the Emperor's mother was well-versed in the art of *Nob*, the Emperor himself was not so much. But this occasion became successful in attracting the Emperor's interest as well as other nobilities', and some of the nobilities started financially supporting *Nob* artists who were then in a miserable situation after the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867.<sup>13</sup>

In July 1879, another crucial event to promote the *Nob* Theater occurred. The former President of the United States of America, Ulysses Simpson Grant, whom Iwakura had already met in the Mission's tour, visited Japan, and was invited to Iwakura's residence. Upon Grant's request, two pieces of *Nob*, *Mochizuki* and *Tsuchigumo*, were performed. It was on this occasion that the President suggested the *Nob* as an important national art of Japan to be fostered.<sup>14</sup> Following this event, Iwakura discussed with other noble families, and decided to support *Nob* artists publicly, as in European countries, where the opera is supported by the nobilities. In this process, his encounters with the opera during the tour of the Mission and his knowledge of European nobilities' support of opera definitely became a firm ground for saving the *Nob* Theater from extinction.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, after their experience of Western culture, Iwakura and Kume collaborated in revitalizing and promoting the *Nob* as a national art. It is true that behind their support of the *Nob* Theater there was a political and nationalistic intention to create a national pride

10 Kazuo Ohsumi, »Kume Kunitake to Noh-gaku Kenkyu« (Kume Kunitake and His Study on Noh-music)«, in: *Kume Kunitake no Kenkyu* (Studies on Kume Kunitake), ed. by Toshiaki Ohkubo, Tokyo 1991, p. 374.

11 Yoshimaru Satoh, »Kume Kunitake Nenpu« (Chronology of Kume Kunitake), in: *ibid.*, p. 473–482.

12 See note 8 above.

13 Ohsumi, »Kume Kunitake«, p. 375–376.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 376.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 375–377.

as a civilized country in competing with Western countries. But at the same time, they simply took pride in fostering an art of the Japanese origin which they thought traditionally and aesthetically legitimate.

To conclude, all this history is significant as a process to objectify one's own culture and to identify its position in a global perspective. Until their encounter with the opera, Kume or most of other delegates may not have realized the meaning of the *Noh* Theater because it was too close to them in the Japanese surroundings, and its artistic meaning and social function were already established or assumed in their mind. Further examination of its existence was, therefore, beyond their imagination. But, for the first time, the *Noh* Theater needed to be studied to confirm its value as an asset of traditional Japanese culture, after the contact with the foreign culture. Here is an important consequence of the cultural encounter.

Kume's work on the *Noh* Theater was not regarded as musicological at that time, but now it can be called as such investigation. If it is musicological or not, however, what is important is that Kume tried to explain the origin, music structure, and text of the *Noh* Theater by examining old extant written documents with positivistic approach. Thus, Kume's visit to Berlin certainly had an impact on the process of recognizing the *Noh* Theater as an object that deserves scholarly attention.

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## Soviet Musicology and the ›Nationalities Question‹

### A View from the Baltic

The annexation of the Baltic States by the USSR in 1940–1945 was accompanied by the Sovietization of all aspects of life, including historical scholarship. Baltic musicologists were compelled to participate in the refashioning of their nations' cultural histories so that they would appear to have unfolded in close contact with the Russian nation and in accord with Soviet theories of cultural development. This paper examines two facets of Soviet musicological scholarship that exemplify this endeavor: the refashioning of the life and work of the pre-Soviet Latvian composer Jazeps Vītols into those of an ideal, proto-Soviet citizen; and the attempt to establish the existence of centuries-old cultural ties between the Latvian and the Russian peoples. Such work sought to convince Baltic readers that the Sovietization of their culture was not a recent, foreign imposition, but a reflection of autochthonous Baltic traditions and values.